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BOOK REVIEW

Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (New York: NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 256, \$120, ISBN: 978-1-4411-2933-8.

There seems to be some consensus among academics that for Nietzsche, the untimely polemicist, politics were of secondary concern. An apolitical, individualistic thinker who condemned modern state nationalism, the human rights tradition, and egalitarian democracy with equal vigor, he seems an unlikely resource for political philosophy. Unconventional thinkers, especially those who come into wide circulation posthumously, risk having their work appropriated for unintended purposes. Nietzsche's bellicose rhetoric, aphoristic style and asystematic philosophical motifs not only introduce complex hermeneutic problems to the interpretation of his work, but also tend to allow a myriad of interpretations, even those that the author clearly condemned. Indeed, in the reception of his thought, the question of politics was occasioned by the appropriation of his work by the most incredibly destructive and iconoclastic political moment of the 20th century. The question of Nietzsche's politics then, only became widely circulated by those interested in defending the philosopher against Nazi interpretations. This is not to say that some Nietzschean tropes do not have elitist, eugenic, or delusionally heroic overtones (i.e. species perfectionism, the overman) but rather that the importance of these concepts may have been exacerbated by the question of his ties to Nazism. Now that this association has been widely discredited, we may have finally reached a time in which renewed estimations of his political thought is possible. The collection *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, contains a wide variety of assessments and perspectives, and for this reason it is difficult to generalize the outlook of the text as a whole. It can be said that the text seeks to assess both the status of Nietzsche as a political thinker, as well as attempts to establish the relevance of his thought for political theory. As each author approaches Nietzsche in light of distinct concerns, I will now turn to the individual essays and briefly elaborate their contents.

Paul Patton argues against the legacy of Nietzsche as an anti-democratic thinker by affirming him as a species perfectionist. Patton attempts to discern whether or not his 'grand politics' is incompatible with an egalitarian governing principle. In order to support his view, Patton turns to Nietzsche's account of the origins of justice in capacities for requital, exchange, revenge, and gratitude. As a preconception of the will to power, Nietzsche argues that all things seek to express or exercise distinct capacities, and that human beings are conscious of and affected by their own

actions and the actions of others, leading to a feedback loop of the agent's action and self-estimation. Whereas successful actions beget feelings of power, unsuccessful actions lead to feelings of impotence. By establishing the pleasure of gratification as the foundation of human motivation, Nietzsche reduces political concept formation to a single principle. Patton asks "can we envision a society in which the affirmation of equal rights of all citizens is a means to the feeling of power for individuals and the community as a whole?" (14). In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche draws a distinction between the government as an organizing power, "nothing but an organ of the people," and the government as a state that presupposes a hierarchical relationship to the governed (16). If it is the case that modern societies lead to pluralism, effective and stable institutions need to be able to account for "a plurality of conceptions of the good" (17). Patton argues that Nietzsche is opposed to the protective aspect of the state, but not to democratic self-determination. His species perfectionism is in line with an egalitarian demand insofar as it requires all people to have access to the resources necessary to cultivate this independence. From Patton's conclusion, we can see that Nietzschean thought can be read democratically insofar as democracy is in service of the individual and provides opportunity for the individual to distinguish themselves from the mass.

Rosalyn Diprose aims at recuperating the centrality of truth to politics via honesty and responsibility, despite Nietzsche's perspectivism and his attempts to debunk all forms of political organization. Nietzsche's perspectivism and his apolitical orientation may make it seem that he is not an ally for a discussion of truth in politics. Diprose's strategy is to refine precisely which forms of truth and falsity Nietzsche affirms and rejects, and for what reasons. Political mendacity is noxious; it can destroy the plurality of the public sphere, disorienting individuals in society. Diprose argues that Nietzsche understood this well, and developed a political ontology that does not rely on distinctions between moral and factual truth. Truth, for him, is more about the necessity of social life rather than the accuracy of expression. Diprose further argues that Nietzsche rejected the dishonest mendacity of dogmatism, considered as the willful lying to promote one set of values as universal, and instead supports a "politics of expanded responsibility" (32). Revaluation is a future oriented position for Nietzsche, and genuine responsibility involves reintegrating the past into an undetermined and open future. While perhaps aggressively individualistic and dependent on a heroic conception of political agency, Diprose does well to note the "expansionist" rhetoric surrounding Nietzsche's discussion of philosophers of the future.

Peter R. Sedgwick presents the context of two allegations against Nietzsche's thought: that he understands law in a reductive way that focuses on the vacuity of commands, and that he historicizes the origin of the law in a way that undermines any possibility of "discussing ethical content in the thought of law" (38). In order to answer such criticisms, Sedgwick offers an account of Nietzsche's naturalism that complicates the relationship between the origin of law and the authority of the law. Ultimately Sedgwick argues that Nietzsche's understanding of the relation of authority to law cannot be articulated properly without an account of the dual formation of human subjectivity and the authority in the law, of lawful command and conformity to law.

Robert Guay positions Nietzsche as a unique political thinker that subscribes neither to mass political movements or the politics of direct action, nor to attempts to naturalize politics through an ontology of politics, but rather one that relates to politics in primarily diagnostic terms. Guay's Nietzsche is a thinker that is valuable to politics in his ability to draw insights that escape the normative features of politics today, demonstrating that how we understand politics in the most general sense is actually contingent on a specific historical development in political organization. Nietzsche argues that movements can become impediments when they take themselves as ultimate ends. From this perspective, his understanding and diagnosis of the 'politics of movements' positions him as a radically anti-democratic thinker. This essay ought to be read in contrast to Patton's treatment of Nietzsche in this same volume.

David Owen focuses on Nietzsche's understanding of freedom, arguing that it contains three elements, the artistic, the agonistic, and the perfectionist. Owen argues that artistic agency is expressed in the critical project of revaluation, connecting Nietzsche's understanding of artistic freedom to Kant's account of artistic agency in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Owen ultimately argues that, for Nietzsche, effective agency requires acknowledging and internalizing norms and necessities of the practices through which agency is exercised.

Herman W. Siemens does not shy away from Nietzsche's ontological claims, arguing that his ontology of antagonism, division, and struggle is a resource to radical democratic political theory. While agonistic understandings of politics claim him as an influence, Siemens argues that the exegesis of Nietzsche up to this point is incomplete, and that his thought on ontology contains corrective potential. Owen focuses on the concept of "agonistic respect" that has come into circulation in the works of radical democratic thinkers, arguing that Nietzsche's nuanced treatment of enmity and hatred as the basis of agonistic tension ought to replace the former. In Owen's assessment, political dissensus is ineradicable, but desirable: within it is emancipatory potential for the future of democracy.

Alan D. Schrift argues that underlying Nietzsche's treatment of politics is an attempt to work against the Kantian legitimation technique of appealing to transcendent principles. Schrift positions Nietzsche in line with Spinoza as a philosopher who uses naturally or immanently available concepts in order to ground his claims. In a passage that captures the opposition Schrift appeals to, as well as an example of Nietzsche's 'politics of immanence,' Schrift writes, "When Nietzsche argues that it is the immanent necessities of social existence required by human beings' entry into community that result in the 'internalization of man' that stands at the origin of the 'soul' and the entire inner world, his thinking, like Spinoza's, challenges the assumption that one must ground one's politics or ethics in something transcendent, be it the Platonic Good, the Christian God or the Kantian categorical imperative and autonomous moral self" (111). Schrift's treatment of Nietzsche's politics remains in a comparative mode, which establishes him as an exemplar of immanent politics, but does not move beyond oppositional comparison.

Gary Shapiro focuses on Nietzsche's use of the term *menge*, translated into English as "multitude." Shapiro argues that translators of Nietzsche have not sufficiently differentiated the term multitude from similar terms like masses and herds, arguing that he treats the later in an af-

firmative way. His analysis opens up the possibility of reassessing our understanding of Nietzsche's affirmation of heterogeneous populations. He writes that "the multitude is formed by a mixing of races, cultures, ethnicities, and so on," arguing that Nietzsche affirms the effects of such mixing in producing the Greeks (133). Shapiro's argument provides compelling reasons to distinguish Nietzsche's political thought from the eugenic or xenophobic legacy of naturalistic political thinkers that have been associated with it in the history of his reception, connecting it with a tradition of thinkers concerned with the future of politics and the "formation of new cultural configurations, and the constitution of a diverse population" (133).

Nandita Biswas Mellamphy elaborates an interpretation of Nietzsche through the relation of the overhuman to physiology, positioning this reading as "beyond the extent historicist, hermeneutic and discursive interpretations that seek to resolve, synthesize or idealize contradictory tendencies in his thinking" (155). Mellamphy argues that Nietzsche's materialistic understanding of politics does not result in an anthropomorphic understanding of political agency, but rather results in assigning the transformative agency generative of political effects to inhuman and material forces. Mellamphy further argues that the overhuman is a strategic concept that Nietzsche uses to radically rethink the place and fate of human life, replacing anthropocentric political thought which he does consider to be vain and absurd. The result is not a binary opposition between the overhuman and the human, as Mellamphy writes, "the human is a 'machine' the materiality of which produces and 'secretes' 'a luxury surplus' which Nietzsche conceptualizes metaphorically in terms of an 'overman'" (152). Considering the overhuman as transcending the human, Mellamphy argues, is a mistake, as the former is produced through the latter in Nietzsche's thought. Her work testifies to the importance of not attempting to account for Nietzsche (or, perhaps for that matter, other unconventional thinkers) in "pre-ordained ideological positions" (154). Hermeneutists may wonder, however, how to determine if such an approach is successful, how much of the Nietzschean corpus it is meant to apply to, or if it "appears deep" by disguising political commitment in the inhuman rhetoric of mechanical processes.¹

Michael Ure focuses on Nietzsche's philosophy of self-cultivation and investigates how it applies to politics. Nietzsche's appropriation of Hellenistic philosophical therapy has been a hotbed for Nietzsche scholarship in recent years, but Ure's essay is differentiated due to the way he focuses on the influence of the line of thought as it manifests in Nietzsche's later works. Ure does not attempt to domesticate his elitism, writing that "Nietzsche's later bio-political agenda aims only at healing those rare higher individuals who have the capacity to elevate the species" (169). Ure argues that this bio-political agenda, of "species enhancement" is incompatible with mass scale political autonomy, and as such the 'therapy' that Nietzsche proposes is intended to cleanse "higher types" of "any compassion that might stand in the way" (171). The essay ought to be read in conjunction with the developing body of literature surrounding Nietzsche's therapeutic philosophy.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §173, 136.

Vanessa Lemm argues against the reception of Nietzsche as a philosopher who favored the “aristocratic politics of domination” by interrogating the relationship between ‘great politics’ and his conception of “the event” (179). Lemm distinguishes between “small and great politics” in Nietzsche’s thought, the former situated within historical time, in which very little happens, and the later beyond historical time. Roughly speaking, the division corresponds to a model of history in which necessity and human agency produce ‘small events,’ and a model of ‘great politics’ in which the “spiritualization” of small events makes these philosophical rather than routinely political (193). Lemm argues that ‘great politics,’ understood in this way is not a partial reflection of “a whole,” as occurs in “aristocratic domination,” thus distinguishing the aristocratic strain of Nietzsche’s thought from the domain of ‘great politics’ (193).

Daniel Conway focuses on Nietzsche’s reflexive treatment of morality, his ‘immoralism,’ as a moralistic critique that uses the “authority and power of moralism” against morality. This overturning of morality, Conway argues, can be used to understand Nietzsche’s connection of the overcoming of morality to a coming “tragic age” (211). In this tragic age, Conway argues, “moral authority will reside in no one,” as morality “will have exhausted itself as a viable engine of cultural advancement” (212). The self-exhaustion of morality can be ascribed to the work of Nietzsche, “the first immoralist,” who turned the power and authority of morality against itself.

Bruno Bosteels returns to the work of Pierre Klossowski in light of Alain Badiou’s lectures on Nietzsche and antiphilosophy. Bosteels characterizes the connection of these thinkers in the following way, “in the conjunction between the value of life, greatness and the need to overturn all hitherto existing valuations and types of philosopher there lies the core of what Badiou will treat in terms of Nietzsche’s antiphilosophy,” further arguing that what connects the thinkers is the “notion of the act or the event” (221). Focusing on his claim to “break the history of humanity in two halves,” Bosteels articulates an understanding of Nietzsche’s grand politics “in contrast [...] to all other forms of politics” which “no matter how violent or revolutionary, will turn out to have been minor, petty or inauthentic” (222). This radical political act signifies Nietzsche’s admittance to the ranks of the antiphilosophers. Bosteels writes “the notion of the act is without a doubt the most important element in the formal characterization of any antiphilosophy, namely, the reliance on a radical gesture that alone has the force of dismantling, and occasionally overtaking, the philosophical category of truth” (225). What Badiou terms the “archipolitical act” in Nietzsche’s thought has the effect of providing the “leverage to reject all actually existing politics, including revolutionary politics, as being petty and inauthentic in comparison” (229). This essay, like some former essays in the collection, positions Nietzsche’s apolitical orientation as a radical rejection of routine politics.

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